

How Prophecy Motivates Us to Obedience

Jeremiah 25:8–13; Ezra 1

As had been planned for some weeks and announced last Lord's day, but is providentially being delivered today, March 1, 2026, this is the last in a series of sermons examining biblical texts containing the phrase "that it might be fulfilled." These exact words are used nine times by the Matthew, the author of the first Gospel. We also looked at a text in John's gospel that contains a similar phrase: "that *the word of Isaiah the prophet* might be fulfilled."

Christian apologists—those who speak and write in defense of the faith—like to speak of fulfilled prophecy, because it is evidence that Christianity is true. God alone knows the future, so when an Old Testament prophecy foretells a certain event, and that event comes to pass exactly as prophesied, it is evidence that *God*, not man, is the author of Holy Scripture. This knowledge is a great comfort to the redeemed heart. In the words of the hymnwriter: "Be still, my soul: your God will undertake to guide the future as he has the past. Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake; all now mysterious shall be bright at last."¹ Man's knowledge is limited, but God's knowledge is exhaustive—comprehensive. Man doesn't know why things happen, but God knows *perfectly* why things happen. That is why our trust must always be in our wise heavenly Father who does all things well.²

We generally think of fulfilled prophecy as a New Testament phenomenon: events prophesied in the Old Testament that are fulfilled with the coming of Christ, as documented in the New Testament. This is true, by and large, but our text this morning contains a striking example of an Old Testament prophecy recorded by Jeremiah, one of the major prophets, whose prophecy is fulfilled to the letter within a time period of a hundred years. Interestingly, the prophecy is recorded later in Scripture than the fulfillment—the book of Jeremiah occurs *after* Ezra. But that is because the order of books in our English Old Testament is thematic: law, history, poetry, prophecy. When you read the prophets, pay particular attention to *when* they prophesied, especially the opening verses of each book.³ It is evident that Jeremiah, who was quite young when God called him to be a prophet, would live to see Jerusalem taken captive by the Babylonians. Those were turbulent, unsettling times—kind of like our own! How comforting to know that *God*—not man—is ultimately in charge. We will return to this theme later in this sermon. By the way, I encourage you to jot down all Scripture references referred to in this sermon. If you miss some of them, the sermon manuscript will be posted on our website later today.

¹ "Be Still, My Soul" (*Trinity Psalter Hymnal* 532)

² Mark 7:37

³ Isa. 1:1, Jer. 1:1–6, Ezek. 1:1–3, Dan. 1:1–2

Our first Old Testament text, read before the sermon, records a very specific prophecy given given by our LORD to Jeremiah: that the kingdom of Judah would fall and go into captivity in Babylon, and that its captivity would last exactly seventy years. As we shall see, this remarkable prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. Nobody but God could have known how all this would play out. Here's the backstory.

Out of all the nations of the earth listed in Genesis 10, God entered into covenant with Abraham and his seed—that is, Abraham's *descendants*—known to us as the children of Israel. Moses explains that this was not because Israel was worthier or better than any other nation.⁴ God chose Israel solely by grace. He chose Israel so that it could be a light to the nations and ultimately bring the message of Christ to the whole world.⁵ Since the 1830s some Christians have focused on Israel, but that is wrong. *Christ* is the central theme of Scripture. God's purpose is ultimately to “gather together in one all things *in Christ*” (Eph. 1:10). Never forget that!

In Genesis 10–11 God's focus is on the nations. Beginning with Genesis 12:1 his focus is on Abraham. God's covenant with Abraham is on two levels—his *physical* seed and his *spiritual* seed. In one sense God's covenant is with Abraham's *physical* seed, descending from him by ordinary generation. But not all Abraham's physical seed go to heaven—only those whose trust is in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is stated clearly in Romans 9:8: “those who are the children of the flesh, these are *not* the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.” Do not miss this: the children of the promise—that is, those whose trust is in the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel, are the true, spiritual seed of Abraham. Paul made this crystal clear: “And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). Make no mistake: *believing Gentiles and Jews* are Abraham's seed. That's what the Bible says.

There are some well-meaning yet biblically-confused Christians, including some who work in high places, like Zionists Ted Cruz and Mike Huckabee, who believe that the Christian's duty is to support the modern state of Israel—whatever Israel does, including killing innocent people and starting wars; the Christian's duty is to support it—and a lot of well-meaning Christians and independent churches follow them. (Biblically, there is no such thing as an independent church, but I cannot develop that theme now; if you have questions about this, speak to me or one of our elders.) Current events, including the events of *just yesterday* as I speak, show the danger of this trajectory. The Christian is to be a man of peace,

⁴ Deut. 7:7

⁵ Isa. 49:6

following the Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace. “I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war” (Ps. 120:7).

Listen to what God tells Abraham in Genesis 12. He says, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” Here is a great promise, ultimately fulfilled in one man, our Lord Jesus Christ, of the seed of Abraham,⁶ through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed.

The promise was *conditional*. The condition was that Israel remain faithful to God. They were to worship the true God exclusively. They were not to worship the gods of the heathen, which are no gods but the products of men’s hands. God promised extensive blessings if Israel obeyed, and unimaginable cursing if they disobeyed.⁷ Among these cursings would be that Israel would fall to its enemies, who would take them captive and remove them out of their divine inheritance. The later prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah warn over and over that the time of this judgment was coming nearer.

Jeremiah, called as a youth (Jer. 1) had a long prophetic ministry. He may well have been close to 90 when he died, but he did not live to see the fulfillment of his prophecy. He faithfully set the message of judgment before the people, warning them that Israel was going to fall to Babylon because of their sins. In our first Old Testament reading for today we read Jeremiah’s prophecy:

“Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Because you have not heard My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,’ says the LORD, ‘and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon *seventy years*. Then it will come to pass, when *seventy years* are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,’ says the LORD; ‘and I will make it a perpetual desolation.’”

Notice that Jeremiah faithfully passed on the LORD’s message to the people. God would use a heathen king—Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—as his instrument to judge Judah, as well as its neighbors. The people would be “utterly

⁶ Gal. 3:16

⁷ Lev. 25, Deut. 28

destroyed”—the ESV has “I will *devote them to destruction*” (hiphil of הָרַם *hāram*, root of the word *harem*, something totally devoted to a king) for their disobedience. The whole land would become a desolation. It would have no effective government, no defenses, no system of caring for the poor. Its whole supply chain would be disrupted. It would not be able to determine anything for itself. The people would no longer be free but would serve Babylon for seventy years. But after the seventy years were completed, God would punish Babylon and its king. God would use Babylon as his instrument of judgment, but since Babylon would destroy Israel for its *own* glory, and not for the glory of the God who called them to that office, Babylon itself would be destroyed.

Notice the specific number—*seventy* years—in v. 11 of our first Old Testament text: “Shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years” (Jer. 25:11). Ellicott helpfully comments: “This is the first mention of the duration of the captivity. The seventy years are commonly reckoned from B.C. 606, the date of the deportation of Jehoiakim and his princes, to B.C. 536, when the decree for the return of the exiles was issued by Cyrus.”⁸

Initially, there were hopes that the captivity would last only a few years. There were false prophets, *not* sent by God, who were spreading this false message. Jeremiah, who had been imprisoned at the time that Jerusalem fell, sent the captives a letter (Jer. 29:4ff.). He wrote: “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace. For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the LORD.”

So the captivity was not going to be short; it would last seventy years—a long time, considering the average human lifespan: “The days of our years are threescore years and ten”—seventy years (Ps. 90:10). But the number was not “indefinitely” either. Such is what happened to the northern kingdom which had fallen to Assyria in 720 BC. The book of 2 Kings 15:29 records that “in the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and took . . . all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria.” Sadly, no remnant ever returned; the northern kingdom—ten tribes in all—was assimilated into the

⁸ Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers (<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/jeremiah/25-11.htm>), accessed 2-28-26

Gentiles and lost its distinctiveness as the people of God. Such is what happens when a people gives up its faith in the God of the Bible. Such happens when covenant children do not adopt their parents' faith.

So Judah's captivity would not be short, but neither would it be indefinite. It would last exactly *seventy* years. The key text is Jeremiah 25:9, "this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon *seventy years*." This was a very specific prophecy. Our Ezra text records that "in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, *that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled*, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia." (Persia is the ancient name of Iran, the sovereign nation our military attacked just yesterday as a favor to Israel and the Zionists. And as I speak these words I can imagine that yesterday's attack is being celebrated in many a dispensationalist church gathering today. This is a tragic distortion of the message of the Prince of Peace who says, "When I speak, they are for war." The kingdom of Christ does not come through *force*—military or otherwise—but by Christ's Spirit giving men dead in trespasses and sins a new heart.)

Here, then, is the fulfillment of a very specific prophecy: seventy years. This number is confirmed as well at the beginning of Daniel 9, where Daniel writes: "In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish *seventy years* in the desolations of Jerusalem." Daniel understood and believed this prophecy!

Why seventy? Keil and Delitzsch mention seventy as the "significance as the number of perfection for God's works. This significance lies in the contrast of seven, as the characteristic number for works of God, with ten, the number that marks earthly completeness"⁹—seven times ten: *seventy* years.

Jesus would use the same number when he was asked, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until *seventy* times seven" (Matt. 18:21ff.). How often should we forgive our brother? Jesus' answer effectively means: don't keep count!

Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Judah. He destroyed Solomon's Temple and deported the political and priestly classes, as well as successful businessmen, to Babylon. Some of the more promising youth, such as Daniel, were conscripted into the king's service. Those who were left in Judea were mostly leaderless peasants who were less likely to

⁹ Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/jeremiah/25-11.htm>), accessed 2-28-26

revolt against Babylonian rule. It was a system that had been tried in other places and mostly worked.

But what are the chances, humanly speaking, of a specific prophecy—*seventy* years—being fulfilled? Think of the great number of human actors who would each have a part in carrying this out. Yet this is exactly what God did. He put it into the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to allow a remnant of the Jews, taken into captivity by his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, to return to their homeland, rebuild the temple, and restart the worship of Jehovah, the true God. Truly, “the king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Prov. 21:1).

Christian, rejoice! Our God fulfilled his prophecy—right on schedule. Only God could do this!

With regard to yesterday’s military attack, there was a story about a news agency submitting identical queries to four different artificial intelligence platforms regarding the date the U.S. military would attack Iran. Three AI systems predicted a date of early March, while one correctly predicted yesterday’s date.¹⁰ Some skeptics might respond to this sermon by saying, “What’s so great about correctly predicting the future? See, AI can do it now.” But look at the difference! The AI platforms were asked about an event that was expected within a matter of days. By contrast, as we’ve seen in this series of messages, the events predicted in the Old Testament would not be fulfilled for hundreds (the purchase of the potter’s field) or thousands of years (the seed of the woman conquering the Serpent). If AI can get some things right, that’s not the same as biblical prophecy. God’s standard is 100% accuracy.

Moses warned the children of Israel, “If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee” (Deut. 13:1–5).

¹⁰ <https://www.breitbart.com/tech/2026/02/28/elon-musk-grok-ai-chatbot-predicted-exact-date-of-strikes-on-iran/> accessed 2-28-26

With regard to yesterday's attack, our "peace President," who was elected on the promise that he would end unnecessary foreign wars, has, on his own without the requisite Congressional declaration of war, once again attacked a sovereign nation. It would be well for our military to remember Jesus' solemn words: "all who take the sword will perish by the sword."¹¹ Amen!

With regard to ardent dispensationalists such as Cruz and Huckabee, who encourage Christians to support the Zionist cause, here are evangelical Christians—I do not doubt the sincerity of their personal faith in Christ—who sincerely believe, based on a misunderstanding of God's covenant with Abraham, that Christians must unconditionally support the actions of the modern state of Israel, no matter who or how many get killed. But dispensationalism is a teaching that the *whole church* has never approved or officially taught, and there is good reason for this.

God's Word teaches us to pray "for kings, and for all that are in authority; *that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life* in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim 2:2). That is the Word of God! Christianity is a religion of peace, following the Prince of Peace, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian faith does not require us to wage war in order to advance Christ's kingdom. The only war that God requires us to engage in is "*the good fight of faith*," laying hold on eternal life.¹² Christian, commit yourself to follow the Prince of Peace who alone, by his blood, can save murderous, rebellious sinners. Let fulfilled prophecy motivate us always and only to obey Christ our King. Amen!

¹¹ Matt. 26:52 ESV

¹² 1 Tim. 6:12